



## Delivering Resilient Floodplains: Report for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Nature

March 2023

On 18 October last year, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Nature hosted a parliamentary event with the [Floodplain Meadows Partnership](#) to discuss the importance of floodplain meadows, the challenges in realising their full potential, and the opportunities to address these through the Environmental Land Management scheme. The enclosed report sets out a series of recommendations for how we might deliver functioning floodplains that are rich in nature and capable of withstanding climate change.

Currently, the majority of UK floodplains do not function as they should. As a result, society faces the impacts of increased flood risk, poor water quality, increased GHG emissions, loss of amenity and reduced biodiversity. **Research suggests 90% of UK floodplains are no longer fit for purpose<sup>1</sup>.** Farmers are already struggling to use potentially productive land due to the increased frequency of high impact weather events.

There is a growing recognition of the contribution species-rich habitats, such as floodplain meadows, can make to both the climate and biodiversity crises. However there has been a substantial loss of such species-rich habitats over the last century due to changes in land-use. **Nearly 70% of floodplain land is now intensively managed (Heritage and Entwistle 2017<sup>2</sup>), whereas all semi-natural habitats combined occupy a mere 11%.** Species-rich meadows once dominated land-use on English floodplains, but now only fragments remain. These remnants are no longer able to provide all the benefits they could. **More than 97% of our meadows have been lost in the last 100 years** – resulting in biodiversity decline, loss of space for floodwaters, reduced soil-carbon storage and lost access to our rural history. **Restoring species-rich habitats on floodplains would yield significant benefits.** They help mitigate climate change and reduce flood risk, whilst providing food and enhancing biodiversity. However, **species-rich grasslands are not currently recognised within the UK's climate-mitigation strategy.**

We need to champion the role of species-rich grasslands as nature-based solutions, which are of equal importance to woodlands and peatlands. For example, whilst the Environmental Improvement Plan recognises the role that woodlands play, with a promise to continue the “Woodlands for Water” project, we are disappointed that floodplain meadows receive no similar recognition.

<sup>1</sup> Christiansen, T., Azlak, M., Ivits-Wasse, E. (2020) Floodplains: a natural system to preserve and restore. European Environment Agency report Available at <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/floodplains-a-natural-system-to-preserve-and-restore>

<sup>2</sup> Heritage, G. and Entwistle, N.S. (2017). The impact of floodplain degradation on flooding in the UK. E-Proceedings of the 37th IAHR World Congress, 13–18 August 2017, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Despite a number of approaches and conversations with Defra, the Environment Agency and Natural England regarding the tremendous potential for floodplain meadows to deliver improved water quality, better flood management and enhanced biodiversity, no provision for their restoration has yet been proposed.

We hope we can continue the dialogue around floodplain policy in relation to the 25-year Environment Strategy and the recently published Environmental Improvement Plan. We need to make the most of our land with all farming practices being both nature- and climate-friendly. **A Floodplain Strategy would allow floodplains to deliver greater public goods.**

Investment in public goods must meet the scale of environmental need, unlocking the power of the farming sector to tackle the nature and climate crises, whilst producing sufficient sustainable and nutritious food. Access to affordable, trusted and quality advice and training is critical to improving environmental delivery and productivity. **Government should maintain the current agricultural budget in real terms to 2030 and ensure that the majority of this resource be used to reward the delivery of public goods by land managers.**

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss how we might support the conservation and restoration of this wonderfully valuable habitat. Please do get in touch with Olivia Nelson if you are interested in hearing more about this habitat and the work of the Floodplain Meadow Partnership: [Olivia.nelson@open.ac.uk](mailto:Olivia.nelson@open.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Gowing", written over a horizontal line.

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